

Confirmation

Strengthened by the Spirit, Called to Action



Introduction

Confirmation enriches the baptized with the strength of the Holy Spirit so that they can better witness to Christ in word and deed (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1285). Anointed by the Holy Spirit at Confirmation, Christians strengthen their bond with the Church and become better equipped to carry out the Church's mission of love and service.

At Confirmation, our faith and membership in the Body of Christ is confirmed, or strengthened. In the rite of Baptism, we become new members of the body of Christ, but our journey does not end there. The decision to be baptized is followed by continued growth, learning, and witness as members of the body of Christ. Our desire to continue to grow and develop as Christians finds expression in Confirmation, when we renew our baptismal promises and receive in a new way the gift of the Holy Spirit, which strengthens our "bond" with the Church and its members (*Catechism* 1316 and John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 26).

Confirmation connects us to a larger community. The relationship of the bishop (who presides over the rite of Confirmation) with the church community in a given area reminds us of our connection to the larger community of the Church, which is global. Thus, Confirmation reminds us that we belong to the Universal Church, and to a local parish community (*Catechism* 1309). The sacred Chrism oil used during Confirmation points to the community's sharing of the Spirit, since the same oil is used during Baptism and to anoint bishops and priests during the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Oil for the Anointing of the Sick is also consecrated during Holy Week. The symbol of oil reminds us of the action of the Holy Spirit upon us as members in the Church family.

At Confirmation, we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospels, the same Spirit that descended on Jesus during Baptism descends on the apostles at Pentecost (*Catechism* 1285-1287). The readings and homily we hear at Confirmation remind us that this same Spirit is present to us today. At Confirmation, we receive diverse spiritual gifts that work together for the "common good" and "the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity and to the needs of the world" (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 24). At Confirmation, we pray for an increase of the gifts of the Spirit in our own lives in order to serve the cause of justice and peace in Church and world.

The Spirit moves us to imitate the love and service of Christ and the saints. In preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation, we often perform many hours of service to help those in need. In doing so, we practice love and service in imitation of the saints whose names we often take at Confirmation. Anointed at Confirmation, we are further strengthened to live lives that give off "the aroma of Christ" as did the holy saints (*Catechism* 1294). The sacred Chrism is mixed with fragrant spices precisely to symbolize this "aroma."

The Holy Spirit pours love into our hearts so that we can become "instruments of grace" in order to "pour forth God's charity and to weave networks of charity" in the world (Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 5). The Holy Spirit "harmonizes" our hearts with Christ's heart and moves us to love others as Christ loved when he washed the disciples' feet and gave his life for us (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* 19).

At Confirmation, we recommit to participate in the Church's work and mission. Sealing with the gift of the Spirit at Confirmation strengthens us



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for ongoing service in the Body of Christ in the Church and in the world. It prepares us to be active participants in the Church's mission and to "bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds" (*Catechism* 1316). Finally, the Spirit sends us as workers in the vineyard and instruments of the Holy Spirit in renewing the earth and promoting God's kingdom of justice and peace.

Thus, Confirmation is not only an *anointing*, but also a *commissioning* to live out our faith *in the world*. We are already called to mission by virtue of our Baptism, but at Confirmation we are endowed with gifts of the Spirit (like the apostles in Acts 2) to be "ever greater witnesses to the Gospel in the world" (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* 17). As disciples and witnesses to Christ in both Church and world (*Catechism* 1319), we are sent out to act on behalf of the poor and vulnerable, promoting the life and dignity of every human person.

The Holy Spirit inspires us to Gospel action that includes human development and work to end injustice. The Holy Spirit inspires the work of evangelization, which includes work not only for all peoples' spiritual well-being, but also the evangelization of systems and cultures (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 42, 65). The Church's missionary activity includes "a commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples; the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those of minorities; the advancement of women and children; safeguarding the created world," and many other areas of action in the world (*Redemptoris Missio* 37).

In addition, action inspired by the Holy Spirit calls us to "bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of political or economic power." The Spirit also "overcomes barriers and divisions of race, cast or ideology" and makes the Christian-on-mission into "a sign of God's love in the world - a love without exclusion or partiality" (*Redemptoris Missio* 43, 89).

Confirmation calls us to share Christ's mission to promote life and dignity. The baptized, anointed by the Holy Spirit, are incorporated into Christ, who is priest, prophet and king, and called to share in his mission (*Catechism* 1241). We share



Christ's **priestly** mission by giving of ourselves daily in union with Christ's supreme sacrifice on the cross. As **prophets**, we announce the kingdom of God in both word and deed and we witness to the Gospel in family, social life and community, and in our commitment to human life and dignity. We share the **kingly** mission by seeking God's kingdom of justice in the world. We do this when we overcome the kingdom of sin, give of ourselves, recognize Jesus in "the least of these" (Mt. 25:40), and work for justice and peace.

All those anointed by the Spirit at Baptism and Confirmation share Christ's mission in Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." (*Christifideles Laici* 13-14).

Learn about the other sacraments!
Visit "Resources and Tools" at www.usccb.org/jphd.

Questions for Reflection

- *Membership in the community.* What does it mean to be part of the Body of Christ?
- *Gifts of the Spirit.* What gifts have you been given? How are you called to use those gifts to benefit others?
- *Listening to God's call.* Who are you called to be? What are you called to do with your life?
- *Mission in the world.* What is the mission of the Church? What is your role in carrying it out? To what are you *commissioned*?
- *The witness of the saints.* How do the lives of the saints inspire you to "give off the aroma of Christ"?

